



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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Year-long spartina drift card project underway in Puget Sound, Canadian waters

OLYMPIA – Washington state is participating in a “drift card” project with Canada to determine how spartina cordgrass and other destructive, invasive marine plant seeds spread in salt waters of Washington and British Columbia. The bright orange 4-in. by 6-in. wooden plywood cards float on the same tides and currents as a potential spartina or marine plant seed, showing officials where they should look for new infestations.

Through next May, 600 cards will be launched each month from sites in Washington and Canada to determine where tides and currents take them. Launch sites in the U.S. are at South Skagit Bay in Snohomish County; Livingston Bay in Island County; and Turners Cove in Skagit County. Three additional sites are in Canada.

The Puget Sound Action Team, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and the Nature Conservancy are conducting the project in Washington. Ducks Unlimited Canada is conducting the project for Canada.

Persons finding the cards on shorelines are encouraged to telephone the Puget Sound Action Team, 1-800-547-6863, and report the finding. Persons are asked not to throw cards back in the water.

WSDA officials say the project will be particularly helpful in getting rid of spartina in north Puget Sound. Spartina, a very destructive pest weed that grows to heights of four or six feet each summer, converts salt water mudflats to meadows, destroys shorebird and waterfowl habitat, and increases the threat of flooding.

In 1995 the Washington Legislature called spartina infestations in state mudflats an “environmental disaster.” Legislation was passed that year aimed at its total eradication. Of the approximate thousand acres in Skagit, Snohomish, and Island counties infested with spartina in 1997, almost half has been eradicated by a coalition of government and private agencies and entities that include the Washington State Department of Agriculture; Puget Sound Action Team; The Nature Conservancy; noxious weed boards in Skagit, Snohomish, Island, and Whatcom counties; Swinomish tribal community; Tulalip and Suquamish tribes; People for Puget Sound; Wildlands Management; University of Washington Olympic Natural Resource Center; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; and Washington State University.

State officials believe spartina in north Puget Sound can be eradicated by 2010 or 2011.

For more information, contact the Puget Sound Action Team, at 1-800-547-6863, or visit the organization’s Web site at www.psat.wa.gov. Information on spartina on the WSDA Web site is at www.agr.wa.gov/PlantsInsects/Weeds/default.htm.

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(Note for media: If you wish to take a photo of the cards being released into the water from a boat, contact John Lundberg, WSDA, (360) 586-8459. Arrangements can be made for you to go on one of the boats distributing the cards.)